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Indonesia

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

21. November 1979

Dear Mr. Newsom.

STATE VISIT OF PRESIDENT SOEHARTO OF INDONESIA : HUMAN RIGHTS

Thank you for your letter of 13 November in which you expressed the concern felt by yourself and a number of other Members of Parliament about the State Visit of President Soeharto of Indonesia.

Her Majesty The Queen paid a most successful State Visit to Indonesia in 1974 and the invitation to President Soeharto was extended, in part, so that Her Majesty should be able to reciprocate the hospitality that She received.

Britain, unlike some other Western Governments, has not recognised the Indonesian annexation of East Timor. The Indonesians were told at the time of their intervention of the concern which it had provoked in this country. The extent of the deprivation in East Timor occasioned by the events of 1975 and subsequent fighting is only now becoming clear. There are no entirely accurate reports of what happened or of how many people have died, but we welcome the fact that the Indonesians have now allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross to mount a relief operation. As you may know, the EEC has contributed to the ICRC appeal. Peter Blaker raised the matter with the Indonesians during the State Visit and was assured that the Indonesian Red Cross had been delivering relief supplies to East Timor since 1977, and that aid was now moving in in quite substantial quantities.

You also referred to the Indonesian Government's record over political detainees. This has greatly improved since they

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embarked on their programme of releasing or bringing to trial by the end of 1979 all the people kept in custody since the events of 1965/67. Many thousands of detainees have so far been released. According to official statistics there were just over 8,000 still in detention on 1 September and over 4,000 more have been freed since then. More releases are expected, in pursuance of the Government's policy. Amnesty International's estimated figure of 30,000 detainees is certainly no longer accurate.

You may be aware that a delegation of Amnesty International called on the Indonesian Foreign Minister here in London on 15 November. Successive British Governments have considered that progress in human rights is more likely to be achieved by maintaining relations with countries, even though their performance in this respect might leave something to be desired, and that we should take advantage of such a relationship to make clear the importance that we and the Western democratic countries attach to human rights issues. We are watching carefully the programme of releases as it unfolds and hope that it will be completed by the end of the year.

As far as our aid policy is concerned, Indonesia is still one of the poorer developing countries and we think it right to maintain a continuing programme there.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

Stan Newens, Esq., M.P.
